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ABSTRACT

Plans for new school/university entrance examinations and program assessment in the Republic of Korea are examined as such plans represent a significant variable in the formula for educational reform. In 1987, a Presidential Commission on Educational Reform identified evaluation and testing as a critical factor in the reconstruction of the nation's school system. Historically, students studied a national curriculum and were evaluated at grade level on national standardized tests and periodic national high school and college entrance examinations. Policy planners and the professional education community are now dealing with complexities in the reformulation of tests and measurements to reflect individual student aptitude in the redesigned curriculum and to judge institutional competency based on proposed accreditation standards. Unfortunately, consensus has not been reached on the definition of a "scholastic aptitude test", and no bank of test questions has been developed using a standard of reliability and validity. Moreover, universities and secondary schools are inadequately prepared to run their own, independent screening programs. The Commission has recommended preparation of test guidelines by universities based on high school curricula, reinforced career guidance programs, and established quantitative targets and major indicators of educational growth. (TJH)

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SCHOOL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA: CHANGING STRATEGIES IN AN ERA OF REFORM

by

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Remarks Presented at the
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines plans for new school/university entrance examinations and program assessment in the Republic of Korea as a significant variable in the formula for educational reform. This effort is in its infancy as only recently (1987) did a distinguished Presidential Commission on Educational Reform identify evaluation and testing as a critical factor in the reconstruction of the nation's school system.

Historically students in the ROK have studied a national curriculum and were evaluated at grade level on national standardized tests and periodic national entrance examinations to high school and to the university. While this has been a rigid and unbending method of schooling which broke the hearts and minds of many children and their parents, it represented a constancy of alleged academic excellence. The policy makers, the educational community, and the public alike knew what was taught and by what means mastery was measured.

This system with its many limitations is no longer viable if education is to be the driving force for national development. Policy planners and the professional education community are now dealing with the complexities in the reformulation of tests and measurements to reflect individual student aptitude in a redesigned curriculum and to judge institutional competency based on proposed accreditation standards.

Many relative problems loom large in the immediate future, among them test construction. Test making at best is a complicated task. In the ROK consensus has not been reached as to the definition of what constitutes a scholastic

aptitude test nor has any bank of test questions been developed with any standard of reliability and validity. In the meantime the universities and secondary schools, long dependent upon a centrally devised screening system, are unsure as to how to independently run their own screening devices. Caught in the middle students are equally uncertain of how to prepare for the new entrance examinations whereas expectations about the former system were well known with its over-emphasis on Mathematics, Science, and the English and Korean languages.

The Presidential Commission has suggested that universities prepare test guidelines within the bounds of the existing high school curriculum and that they control the number of test topics lest they overload the examinees. The Commissioners also advise the high schools to strengthen their career guidance programs so that students are counseled more appropriately as to occupational choices based on aptitude. In any event the proliferation of entrance examination criteria will produce a rich diversity of opportunities to meet the needs of a variety of students, but it most certainly will add to the confusion in determining "has Kee Duk Sung learned anything?" as well as where he can learn it the best.

In the absence of firm qualitiative measures, the Presidential Commission has established a number of prescribed quantitative targets as major indicators of education growth. These include lowering the number of enrollees per school, the number of students per class, the number of classrooms per school, and the number of students per teacher by 2001. Estimated projections total more than a third of a trillion dollars of new money to meet these and the other goals identified as essential to educational reform. As in so many

other countries, education in the ROK is in competition for resources with other high national priorities. What is needed now is the acknowledgment of a national commitment to educational reform from top leadership in government, industry, commerce, the professions, and from the public at large. The necessary economic sacrifices to achieve national development on a grand scale will require public and repeated affirmation.

MAJOR POINTS

PROBLEMS IN THE STRUCTURE OF KOREAN SCHOOLS

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A Mistaken View of Education

(1) Life in the Classroom

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PROBLEMS IN THE STRUCTURE OF KOREAN SCHOOLS. A brief sketch of the conditions which have prevailed for many decades in the organization and administration of schools in the ROK will set the background for a discussion on the need for evaluation reform. **(1)** One fundamental condition which has demanded remediation in the Republic of Korea (ROK) school system stems from a rigidly uniform educational system unable and unwilling to cater to individual aptitudes and needs. This unresponsiveness of the system has resulted in generations of youth who have left their foreshortened schooling with disabling learning deficiencies. **(2)** This problem has been exaccerbated by a second major characteristic of Korean schooling. Schools have degenerated into institutions for entrance examinstion preparation with the emphasis on rote learning and verbalization to the virtual exclusion of other skills. **(3)** Undergirding this inflexibility in the teaching-learning process a third fatal flaw has emerged. Teachers have managed instruction and evaluation in ways which have fostered a keen (and destructive) sense of competition from the very earliest stages of development. **(4)** A fourth physical problem can not be concealed from public view. Intolerably over-crowded classrooms with seventy and more children have underscored the inability of the government to provide the necessary physical facilities for the rapidly growing number of children.

A dehumanizing educational climate has resulted which has had a deleterious impact on the process of instruction and evaluation and has been utterly irrelevant to preparing youngsters to cope with a new society that demanded a high order of knowledge and skill. As new courses of study, textbooks, and

instructional materials become available, evaluation will be uppermost in the collective mind of a nation which views education as an instrument of public policy. (The Presidential Commission for Educational Reform (TPCER), 1987)

EVALUATION IN ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

A Mistaken View of Education. The burning desire of Koreans for education which has few paralleles in the world is the major driving force for national development. On the other hand, it has led to the blind pursuit of education with a narrow interpretation of its goal and created a trend to view education as a mere vehicle for advancing to the next higher level of schooling in quest of a diploma. Koreans have over-valued educational advancement as a means to obtain a higher social and economic status and have been satisfied that this represented the ultimate goal in life. The ensuing frustrations have been legion.

(1) Life in the Classroom. The focus of classroom activity in the primary and secondary levels has been on test mastery. Test grades have stood as the lone indicator of students' potential for growth causing them to fear the consequences if they failed to make high grades. As teachers geared educational programs to preparing for examinations, rote-learning and memorization have dominated classroom instruction. Teachers naturally focused on drilling subject matter contained in the examinations to the virtual exclusion of reasoning and critical thinking. Extra lessons carried youngsters through grinding works well into the night. All of these intense activities were designed to cram into the head fragmentary bits of knowledge which were likely to be included in the examination.

Education of the whole person has had no place in the curriculum nor have opportunities to nurture moral quality and aesthetic sensibilities been provided. Extra-curricular activities have been given little attention, and hours set aside for homeroom have not been organized to promote inter-personal skills to any significant degree. Libraries are little more than repositories for textbooks. The total school climate has hindered individual self-development. (TPCER, 1987)

The primary and secondary schools have exaccebated this dilemma as their program quality and overall worthiness has been measured by the number of successful applicants they can get admitted to the next higher level prestigious institution (either high school or university). There is fierce competition among the schools as they skirmish for labels of excellence which will draw greater numbers of students to them and assure their survival. In the very earliest stages of development, children have been exposed to a ruthless world of competition. (TPCER, 1987)

This misled zeal for education and overbearing care has prompted parents to interfere unjustifiably in school affairs. Parental source of pressure has kept children in the grip of the doldrums alternating with mental stress. Mothers, in particular, have been notorious for their unabashed efforts to peddle influence to fix the teacher's attention on their children. Literally, "whirl wind skirts" have meddled in the teacher's classroom affairs. Most parents, even the poorest with their meager resources, have allocated funds for extensive out-of-classroom tutorial instruction to the extent that the government was forced to ban the practice with its deleterious affect on students' physical and mental health. (Wilson, 1989)

(2) Higher Education and the World of Work. The "rush to the universities" has become an obsession in Korean life and has led to a hierarchical ranking of these institutions. The total number of candidates for higher education in 1987 was 397,000, but those who actually obtained entry represented only 61.6 percent of the total (243,000). Each year approximately 240,000 students (who failed to gain entry in prior years and are in a vicious cycle of annual examination preparation) swell the ranks of first time applicants. Competition for admission is fierce and has resulted in applicants selecting areas of major study based on the expediency of obtaining entry, irrespective of the students' interests or aptitudes.

Respect for literary and scholarly pursuits among Koreans has accorded educators and academics a place of high esteem in society. This is manifiested in college applicants' general preference for humanities and the social sciences as the sure road to prestigious and lucrative jobs. This "over-heated" enthusiasm for education and over emphasis on level of educational attainment as an almost exclusive indicator of employability and of other social competencies has been a source of grave disillusionment for graduates and their sacrificing parents.

Today statistics show that many job seekers are over-educated in relation to jobs available. In other words, there is a structural mismatch between the quality of candidates for employment and the level of competency expected on the job. The surplus of educated personnel over employability has created serious social problems For example, among the graduates of academic high schools in 1986, only 7.7 percent were employed. The technical high schools

which used to register a higher ratio of employment, marked 55.7 percent of their total graduates employed. Nearly 540,000 teenagers between the ages of 14 to 19 are unemployed. Policy makers predict this trend will become more evident with the passage of time. (TPCER, 1987)

An urge to break loose from these oppressive conditions and disapopointments has led Korean youth to acts of violence and protest in the major cities which gained world-wide visibility in 1989. A climate destructive of education still remains in tact. It is due to the presence of many complex social, cultural, and institutional forces present in society. High on the list, though, are the mistaken views of education which have inhibited the growth of programs tailored to meet individual needs as well as foster initiative, morality, and creativity, all prerequisites to national development. (TPCER, 1987)

THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM. In early 1985 President Chun established his Presidential Commission for Educational Reform with the charge to propose the necessary changes which would be carried out "under the direct supervision of the President to produce a great people to lead the nation's advance and realize the aspirations for a better life." Two years later the government adopted the Commission's Report which proposed forty-two educational reforms as the foundation upon which the nation could build a better life. (TPCER, 1987)

Reform of the Entrance Examination System. High on the list of imperatives necessary to restructure the educational system the Commission has placed the screening and access process of the primary, secondary, and

tertiary school levels. A review of past and current practice highlights the urgency of this reform.

(1) Examination by High School Cluster: Early Reforms, Strategies for Change, and Possible Dysfunctions and Corrective Measures.

Early Reforms. Prior to 1974, due to the limited opportunities for high school education, no effort was made to curtail free competition for entry spots among candidates. From this free wheeling admission's practice a natural hierarchy of high schools emerged. Those perceived as first rate were able to select the most able candidates who underwent the most rigorous training. As mentioned, cut throat competition among students was the norm. Private tutoring thrived as candidates manuevered for admission and struggled to maintain satisfactory grades during matriculation.

Then in 1974 the Ministry of Education stepped in and initiated policy measures to equalize schools in the secondary system and shatter its competitive hierarchical structure. A revised entrance examination system was institutionalized consisting of two layers - a preliminary examination and then lottery assignment to the high schools. Along with the equalization effort the Ministry encouraged innovative instruction and administration and introduced supplementary programs, self-learning instructional strategies, the flexible grouping of learners, and so forth. Seoul and Pusan initiated the revised organization, and during the next five years, 1975-1980, twenty more cities followed the new model.

Under the direction of the Ministry of Education the revised examination system had the following features:

(1) Vocational high schools selected students on a free, competitive basis through an entrance exam which was administered in advance of the academic high schools' selection process. The intention here was to recruit bright students to vocational education. Subsequently, the academic high schools had their entrants assigned by lottery.

(2) Large cities, namely Seoul, Pusan, Taegu, and Inchon divided their high schools into clusters as an administrative unit for lottery assignment. In other words, candidates whose residence was in a designated cluster were assigned to one of the high schools in that cluster. Smaller cities adopted a single cluster.

(3) The revised entrance examination system applied to all high schools with the exception of the High School for Gifted Students in Science, the arts high schools, and the athletic high schools.

From an egalitarian viewpoint, the revised entrance examination system deserved high merit for its contribution toward eliminating the quality gap among high schools, saving the children from "the examination hell", and assisting in the resoration of program-oriented examinations. Its contribution can also be seen in relation to solving social problems. A diminished number of repeaters who used to follow the vicious cycle of examination preparation resulted, and it helped close gaps in the social strata and reduced quality differences among regions.

On the other hand, the revised entrance examination system brought heterogeneous backgrounds into the classroom and rendered the traditional methods of instruction obsolete. Concern for equal opportunities left islands of excellence submerged by a sea of mediocrity. Students' latitude of choice

was limited. All this had an impact on the private schools which have had a historic importance in ROK education. Their autonomy was undermined and their efforts stymied to develop unique programs as they scrambled to retain a faltering student enrollment. (TPCER, 1987)

Strategies for Change. The Commission on Educational Reform noted the limitations in the fifteen year old system and recommended three very specific departures:

(1) Each high school is to assume responsibility for testing the eligibility of its students and must consider student achievement in middle school as part of that determination. Students should be permitted to apply to any high school in their cluster (as opposed to assignment by lottery).

(2) Any high school unwilling to select students through its own screening devices might consider adapting the present system (with its centralized focus) with modifications.

(3) The provincial and city boards of education are to assume more autonomy and become responsible for individual testing and any modification of the present system. Although testing items may differ from school to school, these boards are to standardize the testing procedures as to format, components, and weight given to middle school achievement. (TPCER, 1987)

Possible Dysfunctions and Corrective Measures. The Commission recognized that high schools which select entrants through their own examinations might gain an extra adcvantage in developing into first rate schools by virtue of their right to select entrants from a larger number of candidates. By contrast, those which adhere to the present system may be left behind, stigmatised as inferior schools. When two such types of high schools

exist in one district, the gap between them will remain a lingering problem. Boards of education, therefore, are directed to favor support to the latter in recruiting qualified teachers and expanding and upgrading facilities.

With the advent of new schools for the gifted and other special schools, the gap among high schools has not been eliminated. Competitive examination pressure is rearing its ugly head again with students and parents once again seeking private tutoring to gain the upper hand in the entrance examination scramble. The Commission is urging a three pronged attack on this problem:

First, career guidance is to be introduced at an early level to focus student goals more accurately.

Second, middle school achievement is to carry more weight and become more of a recognized predictor of success in high school.

Third, the revised or new entrance examination system is to take individual aptitudes into serious account.

(2) Entrance Examinations by Colleges and Universities: Early Reforms, Strategies for Change, and Possible Dysfunctions and Corrective Measures.

Early Reforms. The entrance examination to the university has been a very controversial issue as evidenced by the number of reforms that it has undergone over the past four decades. The present system is based upon a standard achievement test and the applicant's achievement in high school, with heavy reliance on a stereotyped multiple-choice and true-false written test. These tests have not measured the high mental processing skills required of collegiate students. Furthermore, the present entrance examination system has contributed to a discriminant hierarchical order of universities which has helped to perpetuate the gaps among the social

classes. This has been a particularly devastating phenomenon in a small and homogeneous country like the ROK.

Cognizant of these problems the Ministry of Education promulgated a new entrance examination system to take effect for the 1988 entering class. Under the new system students must apply to the college or university departments which they wish to enter before taking the scholastic achievement test. The number of subject areas to be tested is thereby reduced, and the universities are given the freedom to add optional topics in the test. New test items include questions requiring subjective judgment and reasoning.

The weight of achievement in high school to total score is set at thirty percent which varies with the reputation of the high schools, divided into ten quality levels The new entrance examination system reflects the best efforts to solve the problems confronting the present system. Yet it leaves much to be desired from the viewpoint of developing critical thinking and reasoning, and guiding career development based on individual aptitudes. It is an uphill fight to develop a viable entrance examination in the social climate which sets great store by the symbolic value of educational attainment. An ideal entrance examination has yet to be developed which ensures the autonomy of each university in selecting students and guiding career development based on aptitude. (TPCER, 1987)

Strategies for Change. The Presidential Commission for Educational Reform is supportive of the new system which still is still too new to evaluate completely; however, apparent omissions have prompted it to recommend procedural changes for the 1990s.

(1) Each university is to be given full autonomy in developing, implementing, and expanding its own screening device. The benefits of such an independent approach are several. Not only will it add to creating a wealth of testing instruments and screening criteria upon which to draw, it will encourage universities to add their own unique measures of evaluation as the need arises. Not to be ignored, the Commission directs, universities to calculate dimensions of student personality, extra-curricular activities, and high school teacher recommendations into the final decision for admittance.

(2) The Central Education Evaluation Institute (CEEI) has a special role in supporting the new entrance examination system. First, it is to maintain a pool of testing items upon which universities may draw in constructing their own testing instrument. The Commission hopes that through this process the proportion of testing items which invoke subjective judgment or logical reasoning will increase relative to the shrinking proportion of multiple-choice and true-false tests. Second, the CEEI is charged with developing objective criteria by which to measure the reliability of subjective evaluation. Third, the CEEI is to be held responsibile for the development of a scholastic aptitude test by the early part of this decade. As soon as the validity of such a test can be established, it will replace the present standard achievement test.

(3) Several other miscellaneous recommendations of the Commission include:

- that the universities are to include points in the final score for the personal interview of the candidates and clarify their interview procedure and scoring.

- that student achievement shown on the high school record are to include the result of the fitness test. In the past, these two were reported in separate documents.

- that universities are to schedule their entrance examinations as many as three separate dates to enable candidates to apply for two or three universities.

Possible Dysfunctions and Corrective Measures.

(1) The Commission acknowledges that the proposed conversion of the standard achievement test to a scholastic aptitude test is a complicated task and must, of necessity, invlove prolonged research. The Central Education Evaluation Institute and other such agencies are to be given the necessary administrative and financial resources to support this important activity.

(2) Since universitities have long been dependent on a centrally devised screening system, it may take a good while for them to develop the competencies to run their own systems with the fullest degree of autonomy. Therefore, the Commission is recommending that the new system be phased in, beginning with the elimination of control and influence on the part of the government, in favor of its support and encouragement.

(3) The new entrance examination which holds universities responsible for the development and operation of their own screening devices may leave the way open for high school teachers and administrators to aim their programs to help students pass a certain kind of entrance examination. To avoid the negative fallout from over-specialization, guidelines are to be agreed upon to

keep test items within the bounds of the existing high school curriculum and to control the number of test topics lest the examinees become overloaded.

(4) The lack of understanding on the part of students who face the new entrance examination system may be a serious obstacle to its implementation. Career guidance components are to strengthen their information services to promote students' understanding of the new system and to encourage goal choices based on the students' realistic appraisal of their aptitudes, interests, and abilities.

Program Evaluation and College/University Accreditation as Ongoing Activities. The Commission addressed evaluation issues as they relate to the regular curriculum and teaching methods, the specific assessment of mathematics and science, and an evaluation and accreditation system. Each of these will be discussed briefly.

(1) Assessment and the Revision of Curriculum and Teaching Methods. The Commission believes that the present curricula, standarized at the national level, leaves little room for a creative approach at the school. The necessary reforms are to be undertaken on a continuous cycle of research, development, implementation, and evaluation. Despite the growing importance of R and D efforts in the ROK have been sporadic. Very often, this task has been monopolized by a handful of supervisors in the Ministry of Education, assisted by its subsidiary organization, the CEEI.

The Commission concedes that the development of curriculum is a complicated process, the effectiveness of which is ensured by a systematic and consistent

approach based on scientific know-how and professional expertise. As part of a scheme for quality control, the Commission is recommending that an achievement test be conducted on a regular basis, either at the national or provincial level. It is important, the Commission maintains, that this achievement test measure the degree to which objectives are met in each subject area and that it leads to ways to improve instruction. This on-going process is to identify changing patterns of achievement, regional variations of achievement, and the gap between educational goals and practices. The regualr achievement test is to be supplemented by surveys on a sampled population to identify further the instructional needs of the school population.

To place this strand of evaluation into the organizational structure of the school system with a high degree of professionalism, the Commission is calling for the expansion of the Central Education Evaluation Institute to include a better educated staff and the necessary computer hardware and software to handle the wide variety of tasks associated with the establishment of this feedback mechanism. Among the more important of these: the development of test items for the entrance examinations and achievement tests, the study of theoretical and applied research on evaluation, the management of an items pool, scoring procedures and the processing of test results, staff development for classroom teachers, and the training of evaluation specialists. (TPCER, 1987)

(2) Mathematics and Science Assessment. A basic goal of science and technology education in the ROK is to enhance the scientific and technological literacy of students and, at the same time, produce high-level

scientific manpower which will spearhead the nation's scientific and technological development.

Evaluation is a very important dimension of quality control in science and math education and has a profound impact on the operation of the curriculum. Heretofore, evaluation has measured the accumulation of knowledge alone, and instruction has been geared to imparting knowledge and emphasizing rote-learning and the memorization of bits of information. Science education in the ROK has been knowledge-bound, and the current evaluation scheme is characterized by its uniformity and simplicity. A recent study (Second International Study of Science Achievement:IEA) disclosed that Korean secondary school students lagged behind those of other countries in scientific thinking and problem solving ability.

Not surprisingly, leading educators, reacting to this dilemma of underachievement, have turned their eyes toward the development of scientific reasoning, problem-solving skills, and the attitudes of scientific inquiry as prime goals in the science curriculum. Considering that the level of science achievement has much to do with the nation's potential for development, these deficiencies were taken seriously by the Commission, too.

Among other strategies the Commission has recommended that a variety of evaluation instruments be developed to measure scientific attitudes and ways of thinking, problem-solving abilities, the understanding of principles, and expertise in the conducting of experiements in specific courses. Teachers are to be concerned with formative evaluation activities (as well as the summative) as a means of enhancing instuctional effectiveness.

On a macro level the Commission is advocating a nationwide science achievement test to be conducted at three year intervals to shed light on achievement levels and regional patterns of primary and secondary school students. Such an effort is to focus not so much on individual achievement but on the variation of achievement by region, sex, and grade levels. Feedback of this kind will be sought as data useful in curriculum revision and helpful in formulating public policy.

The Commission is also recommending ROK participation in international studies of science competency to measure student progress against the norms in advanced countries.

(3) Establishing an Evaluation and Accreditation System. The Presidential Commission for Educational Reform has addressed the need to assess how well universities are meeting their teaching, research, and service responsibilities. It has proposed that the Korean Council for University Education include evaluation and accreditation as part of its operation and organize a national and regional plan for its implementation. No precedent exists in the ROK for outside scrutiny of university operations; however, as many Korean academics have recieved their degrees from and have taught in foreign institutions where evaluation and accreditation are well established, their acceptance of such a proposal can be anticipated. Despite this, the Commission has raised concerns that institutions found to be lagging behind the established criteria may attempt to thwart the process, especially as the results of the evaluation and accreditation will be released to the public. (TPCER, 1987)

CONCLUSION. The work of the Presidential Commission for Educational Reform has been invaluable in designing a 21st Century blueprint for the restructuring of education. It has presented a careful analysis, well documented, of the range of problems, the proposed solutions, and the anticipated difficulties. Assessment of educational outcomes presents one of the thornier challlenges In the absence of an effective qualitative feedback system's being in place in the next decade, the Commission has filled the gap by prescribing a number of quantitative targets as major indicators of education growth. These include lowering the number of enrollees per school, the number of students per class, the number of classrooms per school, and the number of students per teacher by 2001. Estimated projections total more than a third of a trillion dollars of new money to meet these and the other goals in the report. (Wilson, 1990)

Education in the ROK is in competition for resources with other high national priorities. What is needed now is the acknowledgment of a national commitment to educational reform from top leadership in government, industry, commerce, the professions, and from the public at large. The necessary economic sacrifices to achieve national development on a grand scale will require public and repeated affirmation.

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